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Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the seventy-second session

Observer status for the Global Environment Facility in the General Assembly

Note verbale dated 12 August 2017 from the Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General and has the honour to request, pursuant to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly of a supplementary item entitled "Observer status for the Global Environment Facility in the General Assembly".

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, enclosed herewith are an explanatory memorandum (annex I) and a draft resolution (annex II).

The Permanent Mission of Uruguay requests that the present letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

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Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

I. Historical background

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was created to provide funding to developing countries for projects that achieve global environmental benefits.

In the 1980s, as the realization set in that environmental damage was truly global in nature, the international community responded with the negotiation of the Montreal Protocol to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Biodiversity and Agenda 21, which was proclaimed at the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held at Rio de Janeiro.

In this context, many ideas were discussed on new sources of funding for the activities necessary to address environmental degradation. In September 1989, France proposed that the World Bank be provided with additional resources to fund environmental projects, offering to support it with a contribution of 900 million French francs over a three-year period. Its proposal was quickly seconded by Germany. And little more than a year later, in November 1990, 27 countries, including nine developing ones, agreed to set up a pilot Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The World Bank acted as both trustee and administrator; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed most of the capacity-building proposals; and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concentrated on strategic planning and issues concerning science and technology. It was a remarkable blend of United Nations and Bretton Woods institutions.

At the first participants meeting, in December 1991, developing countries stressed the need for universal membership of GEF and democratic decision-making, and the donors agreed. In the final weeks before the Earth Summit in Rio opened, the negotiators of the climate and biodiversity conventions agreed that GEF should be designated as the operator of their agreements' financial mechanisms, on the basis that it would be restructured and its membership made universal.

Almost three years of intensive talks followed in Abidjan, Rome, Beijing, Washington, D.C., Paris and Cartagena. Negotiations to restructure the Global Environment Facility concluded at a GEF participants meeting in Geneva in March 1994, with the acceptance by representatives of 73 States of the Instrument for the Establishment of the Restructured Global Environment Facility. The Instrument was formally adopted, in accordance with its paragraph 1, by the three implementing agencies of GEF: UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank. The Instrument became effective on 7 July 1994.

The Global Environment Facility currently has 183 participant countries (see www.thegef.org/country) and supports projects and programmes in five focal areas: climate change, biological diversity, land degradation, international waters and chemicals and waste. GEF serves as a financial mechanism for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, and the Minamata Convention on Mercury. While not formally linked to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, GEF provides support to its work in countries with economies in transition. GEF works as a partnership with 18 implementing partner agencies, including United Nations organizations, multilateral development banks,

and major civil society organizations. It works closely with civil society organizations represented though the GEF civil society organization network. GEF has a special programme to support community-based organizations called the GEF Small Grants Programme. GEF also supports activities involving the private sector, in particular through its non-grant instrument.

II. Purpose and function

Pursuant to article 2 of the Instrument, "The GEF shall operate ... as a mechanism for international cooperation for the purpose of providing new and additional grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed incremental costs of measures to achieve agreed global environmental benefits".

For this purpose, the GEF trust fund has been replenished six times. In its 25-year history, GEF has invested $16 billion directly, and leveraged $90 billion in additional resources, for over 4,000 projects in 167 countries. GEF is the largest public funder of actions to protect the global environment.

A. Climate change

In climate change mitigation, over 1,000 projects target a vast range of sectors: from technology transfer, energy efficiency, renewable energy and transport to land use, land-use change and forestry. Together, GEF investments have supported more than 50 low-emission technologies, and directly helped to reduce 2.7 billion tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Global Environment Facility is a mechanism for adaptation to climate change, managing two funds under the Framework Convention on Climate Change for that purpose: the least developed countries fund and the special climate change fund. GEF has approved over $1 billion through the least developed countries fund for adaptation projects and programmes, as well as activities to help countries to lay the foundation for adaptation. It has financed the preparation of 51 national adaptation programmes of action. Through the special climate change fund, GEF has provided over $300 million for adaptation projects, mobilizing another $2.3 billion from other partners. GEF climate change adaptation projects have helped to reduce the vulnerability of more than 17 million people in 129 countries around the world.

The 2016 Paris Agreement mandated GEF to lead the capacity-building initiative on transparency that helps countries to comply with their commitments under article 13 of that Agreement. Over $50 million have been raised for this purpose and over 10 projects are currently under way. Activities include strengthening national institutions for transparency-related activities in line with national priorities; providing relevant tools, training and assistance for meeting the provisions stipulated in article 13 of the Agreement; and assisting in the improvement of transparency over time.

B. Biological diversity

The Global Environment Facility has invested over $4.5 billion to conserve and sustainably use global biodiversity. This investment has leveraged over $12 billion in additional funds, supporting 1,300 projects in more than 155 countries. As the largest funding mechanism for protected areas worldwide, GEF has invested in over 3,300 protected areas, covering more than 860 million ha, an area larger than the size of Brazil. GEF has also provided biodiversity protection and planning for more than 350 million ha of productive landscapes and seascapes. In addition, GEF has supported the development of national biosafety frameworks

in 126 countries, and their subsequent implementation under the Cartagena Protocol. Mainstreaming ecosystem services has been a focus of many GEF projects.

C. Land degradation

Since 2006, when land degradation became a dedicated GEF focal area, GEF has provided $876 million in resources for 190 projects and programmes with a specific focus on supporting sustainable land management to combat desertification and deforestation, creating multiple benefits for the global environment in production landscapes. The land degradation focal area projects and programmes have targeted 281 million ha of agro-ecosystems globally. Based on the implementation reports of ongoing projects and programmes, 103 million ha are under sustainable land management. These have benefited more than 50 million smallholders through various activities such as inputs into their farming systems, improvement of irrigation structures, training and capacity-building, and alternative livelihood opportunities. The GEF investment has leveraged almost $3 billion from partners. These funds have helped to hold the line against global land degradation, while simultaneously improving the livelihood base of millions of rural people who rely on agriculture for their livelihood.

D. Chemicals and waste

The Global Environment Facility has adopted an integrated approach to chemicals and waste that combines persistent organic pollutants, ozone-depleting substances, mercury and the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management in a single focal area. This approach maximizes cross-cutting global environmental benefits, while continuing to support the individual chemical conventions. Since the adoption of the Stockholm Convention in 2001, GEF has committed $1 billion dollars to projects concerning persistent organic pollutants. Additional funds invested by partners in the public and private sectors have brought the total value of the portfolio to more than $3 billion dollars. These investments help dispose of PCBs and obsolete pesticides, including DDT. They also reduce both persistent organic pollutants unintentionally generated by industrialized countries and those produced in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. GEF has invested $200 million to help 18 countries with economies in transition to meet the phase-out targets of the Montreal Protocol for ozone-depleting substances. National and bilateral partners contributed an additional $211 million to these projects, which have transferred new technologies, enhanced recycling operations and provided training to reduce the use of ozone-depleting substances. With GEF support, consumption and production of chlorofluorocarbons have been eliminated and work continues on addressing other ozone-depleting substances such as hydrochlorofluorocarbons.

Since 2010, GEF has committed $47 million to mercury projects. These range from Minamata initial assessments, development and capacity-building to health-care waste management, life cycle management of mercury-containing products and waste, and artisanal small-scale gold mining.

E. International waters

The Global Environment Facility is a significant global funder of multi-country collaborations on shared water systems, including both freshwater and oceans. Projects support 34 transboundary river basins in 73 countries, 12 transboundary lakes, 8 transboundary groundwater basins and 23 of Earth's 64 large marine ecosystems, shared by developing countries working together to manage their transboundary water resources. More than $1.8 billion has been invested directly, leveraging $11 billion in additional funds for over 230 projects in 170 countries.

III. Governance bodies

The governance structure of the Global Environment Facility consists of the Assembly, the Council, the secretariat and the Independent Evaluation Office. It also has a Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel. Their functions are as follows:

Assembly

The Assembly consists of representatives of all participants and meets every four years. The Assembly reviews the general policies of the Facility; reviews and evaluates the operation of the Facility on the basis of reports submitted by the Council; keeps under review the membership of the Facility; and considers, for approval by consensus, amendments to the Instrument on the basis of recommendations by the Council.

Council

The Council consists of 32 members, and an equal number of alternate members representing constituency groupings formulated and distributed, taking into account the need for balanced and equitable representation of all participants and giving due weight to the funding efforts of all donors. It has 16 members from developing countries, 14 members from developed countries and 2 members from the countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Council meets twice a year.

The Council keeps under review the operation of the Facility with respect to its purposes, scope and objectives; ensures that GEF policies, programmes, operational strategies and projects are monitored and evaluated on a regular basis; reviews and approves the work programme, monitors and evaluates progress in the implementation of the work programme and provides related guidance; directs the utilization of GEF funds, reviews the availability of resources from the GEF trust fund and cooperates with the trustee to mobilize financial resources; approves and periodically reviews operational modalities for the Facility, including operational strategies and directives for project selection, means to facilitate arrangements for project preparation and execution, additional eligibility and other financing criteria, procedural steps to be included in the project cycle, and the mandate, composition and role of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel; acts as the focal point for the purpose of relations with the Conferences of the Parties to the Conventions; ensures that GEF-financed activities relating to the Conventions conform with the policies, programme priorities and eligibility criteria decided by the Conference of the Parties for the purposes of the convention concerned; appoints the Chief Executive Officer, oversees the work of the secretariat, and assigns specific tasks and responsibilities to the secretariat; reviews and approves the administrative budget of GEF and arranges for periodic financial and performance audits; and exercises such other operational functions as may be appropriate to fulfil the purposes of the Facility.

Secretariat

The secretariat shall service and report to the Assembly and the Council. The secretariat implements the decisions of the Assembly and the Council; coordinates the formulation and oversees the implementation of programme activities pursuant to the work programme, ensuring liaison with other bodies as required; ensures the implementation of the operational policies adopted by the Council through the preparation of common guidelines on the project cycle, monitoring of project implementation and evaluation of project results; coordinates with the secretariats

of other international bodies, in particular, the secretariats of the Conventions; reports to the Assembly, the Council and other institutions as directed by the Council; and provides the trustee with all relevant information to enable it to carry out its responsibilities.

Independent Evaluation Office

The Independent Evaluation Office is headed by a director, appointed by and reporting to the Council, whose responsibility it is to carry out independent evaluations consistent with decisions of the Council; and perform any other functions assigned by the Council.

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel

The Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel is an advisory body to the Facility. It is established by UNEP, in consultation with UNDP and the World Bank and on the basis of guidelines and criteria established by the Council. UNEP provides the Panel's secretariat and operates as the liaison between the Facility and the Panel.

IV. Observer status in the General Assembly

It is highly relevant for the Global Environment Facility to be accredited to participate in the meetings of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies as well as other international gatherings involving issues related to the GEF mandate. GEF plays a key role internationally in supporting the implementation of several United Nations global environmental conventions and the global environmental agenda in general. The participation of GEF in major international meetings involving these issues is often critical for GEF to carry out its work and mandate. In addition, GEF has the resources and the expertise to make a significant contribution to all such meetings, dialogues and decisions, by helping to shape the global policy dialogue and by supporting its implementation. For example, though not formally associated with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all GEF projects contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 and the co-benefits in the social and economic areas that result from GEF projects also help to achieve the relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

Annex II

Draft resolution

Observer status for the Global Environment Facility in the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

Wishing to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the Global Environment Facility,

1. *Decides* to invite the Global Environment Facility to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the action necessary to implement the present resolution.